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Made in America: The ISIS Conquest of Mosul

The notorious terror group used US-supplied weapons, US-trained fighters, and funding sent from banks in Washington, DC, to conquer Iraq's second-largest city and terrorize its Sunni Muslim inhabitants.

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Ten years ago this month, the notorious terror group ISIS improbably conquered Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. In only two days of fighting, a few hundred ISIS militants captured the city, forcing thousands of Iraqi soldiers and police to flee in chaos and confusion.

The western media attributed the city's fall to the sectarian policies of then-Iraqi prime minister **Nouri al-Maliki**, suggesting that local Sunnis welcomed the ISIS invasion. US officials claimed they were surprised by the rapid rise of the terror organization, prompting then-US president **Barack Obama** to vow to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the group.

However, a close review of events surrounding the fall of Mosul and discussions with residents during *The Cradle*'s recent visit to the city shows the opposite.

The US and its regional allies used ISIS as a proxy to orchestrate the fall of Mosul, thereby terrorizing its Sunni Muslim inhabitants to achieve specific foreign policy goals. Says one Mosul resident speaking with *The Cradle*:

> There was a plan to let Daesh [ISIS] take Mosul, and the USA was behind it. Everyone here knows this, but no one can say it publicly. It was a war against Sunnis.

'Salafist Principality'

As the war in Syria raged in August 2012, the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) authored a now well-known memo providing the broad outlines of the plan that would lead to Mosul's fall.

The memo stated that the insurgency backed by the US and its regional allies to topple **Bashar al-Assad's** government in Damascus was not led by "moderate rebels" but by extremists, including Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Islamic State of Iraq).

The DIA memo stated further that the US and its allies, "the western powers," welcomed the establishment of a "Salafist principality" by these extremist forces in the Sunni majority areas of eastern Syria and western Iraq. The US goal was to isolate Syria territorially from its main regional supporter, Iran.

Two years later, in June 2014, ISIS conquered Mosul, declaring it the capital of the so-called "Caliphate."

Though the terror group was portrayed as indigenous to Iraq, ISIS only made the "Salafist principality" predicted in the DIA memo a reality with the help of weapons, training, and funding from the US and its close allies.

US and Saudi Weapons

In January 2014, *Reuters* reported that the US Congress "secretly" approved new weapons flows to "moderate Syrian rebels" from the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA).

In subsequent months, the US Army and Saudi Ministry of Defense purchased large quantities of weapons from Eastern European countries, which were then flown to Amman, Jordan, for further distribution to the FSA.

But the "moderate rebels" receiving US and Gulf weapons simply "functioned as battlefield auxiliaries and weapons farms for larger Islamist and jihadist factions, including Syria's Al-Qaeda affiliate," analyst Sam Heller of *The Century Foundation* wrote.

After an exhaustive three-year investigation, EU-funded Conflict Armament Research (CAR) found that the weapons funneled to Syria by the US and Saudi Arabia between 2014 and 2017 were quickly passed on to ISIS, at times within just "days or weeks" of their purchase.

CAR concluded that US and Saudi-purchased weapons "significantly augmented the quantity and quality of weapons available to [ISIS] forces—in numbers far beyond those that would have been available to the group through battlefield capture alone."

> "As far as our evidence shows, the diverters [Saudi and the US] knew what was going on in terms of the risk of supplying weapons to groups in the region," Damien Spleeters of CAR explained.

The US-supplied weapons and equipment quickly reaching ISIS included the iconic Toyota Hilux pickup trucks, which became synonymous with the ISIS brand.

The report stated further that,

> "CAR cannot rule out direct supply to [ISIS] forces from the territories of Jordan and Turkey, especially given the presence of various opposition groups, with shifting allegiances, in cross-border resupply locations."

US Supplies ISIS Directly

The possibility of "direct supply" of US weapons to ISIS raises the question of whether US forces delivered weapons to the terror group not only via so-called Syrian rebels, but directly by transport plane or helicopter.

In the Syrian town of Kobane, US C-130 cargo planes dropped weapons that were recovered by ISIS in October 2014. When ISIS members released a video on social media showing them, US officials acknowledged the weapons drop, but said it was a mistake. They claimed the weapons were meant for the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

However, there is evidence these weapons drops were both common, and deliberate.

Australian academic and Syria expert Tim Anderson has highlighted multiple reports from

Iraqi politicians and security sources claiming US forces regularly dropped weapons to ISIS by helicopter, and even evacuated ISIS commanders from various battles.

The Cradle spoke with a member of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) who claimed he saw US helicopters delivering arms to ISIS while his unit battled the terror group near the city of Baiji in central Iraq in 2015.

Some discount these reports because they come from Shia armed groups and Iraqi government officials enjoying support from Iran, a US enemy.

However, in her book documenting the Yezidi genocide, American author Amy L. Beam took the testimony of a Sunni Arab man from the town of Zawia, near Baiji, who also witnessed US helicopters landing in ISIS territory to support the terror group. The man was also a member of the PMU, but was sympathetic to the US, having previously worked as a translator for the US military. The sight of US forces helping ISIS was, therefore, all the more shocking to him.

> "I swear by my martyr brother, who was assassinated by ISIS, I saw the [US] coalition helping ISIS. I lost my mind when I saw those Apache helicopters landing in an ISIS area," he stated.

When the US helicopters took off, they headed toward Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region. The next day, his unit was attacked by ISIS militants armed with US-made M16 rifles.

The Kurdish Role

Another way US and Saudi-supplied weapons reached ISIS was through Washington's main Kurdish ally in Iraq, Masoud Barzani. Discussing the secret funding for weapons approved by the US Congress in January 2014, *Reuters* noted that "Kurdish groups" had been providing weapons and other aid financed by donors in Qatar to "religious extremist rebel factions."

In the following months, reports emerged that Kurdish officials from Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) were providing weapons to ISIS, including Kornet anti-tank missiles imported from Bulgaria.

Further evidence of Barzani's support for ISIS comes from a lawsuit currently being litigated in the US District Court for the District of Columbia on behalf of the Kurdistan Victim's Fund.

The expansive lawsuit, led by **former US Assistant Attorney James R Tate**, cites testimonies from sources with "direct clandestine access" to senior ranking officials in the KDP, alleging that Barzani's agents "purposefully made US dollar payments to terrorist intermediaries and others that were wired through the United States," including through banks in Washington, DC. These payments "enabled ISIS to carry out terrorist attacks that killed US citizens in Syria, Iraq, and Libya."

Further, the agents made use of "email accounts serviced by US-based email service providers to coordinate and carry out elements of their partnership with ISIS."

It is unthinkable that Barzani regularly arranged payments to ISIS from the heart of the US capital without the knowledge and consent of US intelligence.

An Explicit Agreement

In the spring of 2014, reports emerged of a deal between Barzani and ISIS to divide territory in northern Iraq between them.

French academic and Iraq expert Pierre-Jean Luizard of the Paris-based National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) reported there was "an explicit agreement" between Barzani and ISIS, which "aims to share a number of territories."

According to the agreement, ISIS would take Mosul, while Barzani's security forces, the Peshmerga, would take oil-rich Kirkuk and other "disputed territories" desired for a future independent Kurdish state.

According to Luizard, ISIS was given the role of "routing the Iraqi army, in exchange for which the Peshmerga would not prevent ISIS from entering Mosul or capturing Tikrit."

Özgür Gündem, a Turkish newspaper close to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), reported that a meeting took place on 1 June in Amman, Jordan between representatives of Barzani, Iraqi Baathists, and ISIS leaders. The meeting was organized with the knowledge of the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkiye to make final preparations for the Mosul operation which began just days later.

In an unpublished interview with prominent Lebanese security journalist and *The Cradle* contributor Radwan Mortada, former Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki claimed that meetings were held to plan the Mosul operation in the Iraqi Kurdistan capital, Erbil, which were attended by US military officers.

When US officials denied any involvement, Maliki responded by telling them:

> These are pictures of American officers sitting in this meeting … you are partners in this operation.

The UK Pipeline

A resident from Mosul speaking with *The Cradle* states that many of the ISIS members he encountered during the group's three-year occupation of the city were English-speaking foreigners, in particular the ISIS commanders.

But where did these English-speaking ISIS members come from?

In 2012, UK intelligence established a pipeline to send British and Belgian citizens to fight in Syria. Young men from London and Brussels were recruited by Salafist organizations, Shariah4UK and Shariah4Belgium, established by radical preacher and UK British intelligence asset Anjam Choudary.

These recruits were then sent to Syria, where they joined an armed group, Katibat al-Muhajireen, which enjoyed support from UK intelligence. These British and Belgian fighters then joined ISIS after its official establishment in Syria in April 2013.

Among these fighters was a Londoner named Mohammed Emwazi. Later known as the infamous Jihadi John, Emwazi kidnapped US journalist James Foley in October 2012 as a member of Katibat al-Muhajireen and allegedly executed him in August 2014 after he and

his fellow fighters joined ISIS.

Made in America

The commander of Katibat al-Muhajireen, **Abu Omar al-Shishani**, also later joined ISIS and famously led the terror group's assault on Mosul. Before fighting in Syria and Iraq, Shishani received US training as a member of the country of Georgia's special forces.

In August 2014, the *Washington Post* reported that Libyan members of ISIS had received training from French, UK, and US military and intelligence personnel while fighting in the so-called "revolution" to topple the government of Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011.

Many of these fighters were British but of Libyan origin and traveled to Libya with the encouragement of UK intelligence to topple Qaddafi. They then traveled to Syria and soon joined ISIS or the local Al-Qaeda affiliate, the Nusra Front.

> "Sometimes I joke around and say that I am a fighter made by America," one of the fighters told the *Post.*

There is no indication that the relationship between these fighters and US and UK intelligence ended once they joined ISIS.

A Foreign Occupation

All Mosul residents who spoke with *The Cradle* stated they were terrified of the largely foreign force occupying the city, which included many militants who spoke no Arabic at all. One resident described how ISIS offered an amnesty to local members of the police and security forces, primarily Sunni Muslims, but then rounded up and massacred those who came forward to "repent."

Another resident took *The Cradle* to the site in Mosul's right bank where ISIS publicly executed five workers from the Abu Sherbat juice shop. ISIS had accused the Sunni Arab men of spying for the Iraqi government. ISIS members dressed the men in orange jump suits, forced them to kneel in the street in front of the shop, and shot them in head.

'Maliki Must Go'

US support for the ISIS invasion of Mosul is evident through the actions Washington *refused* to take. US planners monitored the ISIS convoys traveling across the open desert from Syria to assault Mosul in June 2014 but took no action to bomb them.

As former US secretary of defense **Chuck Hagel** acknowledged,

> "It wasn't that we were blind in that area. We had drones, we had satellites, we had intelligence monitoring these groups."

Even after Mosul fell, and as ISIS was threatening Baghdad, Washington planners refused to help unless Maliki stepped down as prime minister.

Maliki claimed in his interview with Mortada that US officials had demanded he impose a siege on Syria to assist in toppling Assad. When Maliki refused, they accused him of sabotaging the Syria regime change operation and sought to use ISIS to topple Iraq's

government.

American sources all but confirm Maliki's claim. The US military-funded *Rand Corporation* noted that the US–Iraqi relationship at this time had become strained "because of the willingness of the Maliki government to facilitate Iranian support to the Assad regime despite significant American opposition."

As Obama's foreign policy advisor, Philip Gordon explained:

> The president was clear he didn't want to launch that campaign [against ISIS] until there was something to defend, and that wasn't Maliki.

New York Times journalist Michael Gordon reported that **Secretary of State John Kerry** traveled to Baghdad two weeks after ISIS captured Mosul to meet with Maliki. Desperate for help, Maliki asked Kerry for airstrikes against ISIS to protect Baghdad, but the latter explained that the US would not help unless the former gave up power.

In July 2014, ISIS fighters were moving captured US artillery and armored vehicles back to Syria across the open desert. Gordon reports further that the ISIS convoys were "easy pickings for American airpower."

However, when US **Major General Dana Pittard** requested authorization to conduct the airstrikes to destroy the convoys, the White House refused, saying the "political prerequisites" had not been met. In other words, Maliki was still prime minister.

Although President Obama ordered airstrikes against ISIS in August 2014, the bombing campaign was only cosmetic. **Lt. Gen. William Mayville**, the US Joint Staff's director of operations, was quick to tell reporters that "these strikes are unlikely to affect ISIL's overall capabilities or its operations in other areas of Iraq or Syria."

The expansion of the so-called Caliphate was only stopped after the Russian air force intervened in the Syria conflict in September 2015. When Russian warplanes began bombing ISIS and other "rebel" groups in Syria, US **Defense Secretary Ashton Carter** became livid, vowing that Russia would "pay the price."

In a private meeting with members of the Syrian opposition, Secretary of State John Kerry later acknowledged that US planners had actually welcomed the ISIS advance on Damascus, in an effort to use it as leverage to force Assad to give up power. Kerry explained that,

> "the reason Russia came in is because ISIL [ISIS] was getting stronger. Daesh [ISIS] was threatening the possibility of going to Damascus. And that is why Russia came in. They didn't want a Daesh [ISIS] government and they supported Assad. And we know this was growing. We were watching. We saw that Daesh [ISIS]was growing in strength. And we thought Assad was threatened. We thought we could manage that Assad might then negotiate. Instead of negotiating, he got Putin to support him [emphasis mine]."

Geopolitical Gains

While claiming to be enemies of ISIS, the US planners and their allies deliberately facilitated the terror group's rise, including its capture of Mosul.

ISIS relied on US and UK-trained fighters, US and Saudi-purchased weapons, and Kurdish-

supplied US dollars – rather than popular support from the city's Sunni residents – to conquer Mosul.

When self-proclaimed caliph and leader of ISIS, **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**, announced the establishment of the so-called Caliphate at the city's historic Nuri Mosque, he set up the very Salafist principality outlined in the DIA document by US intelligence heads.

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